



The South India CHURCHMAN

The Magazine of the Church of South India

JULY 1999

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

JULY 1999

Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
At all the times you can
To all the people you can
As long as ever you can.

(John Wesley)

Procrastination is the thief of time.

(Edward Young)

Work expands to fill the time
available for its completion.

(Parkinson)

Leave the beaten track occasionally
and dive into the woods. You will
be certain to find something you
have never seen before.

(Alexander Graham Bell)

It's quality that counts, not quantity.
A fly lays more eggs than a hen.

(Arabic Proverb)

There are two kinds of people at
parties - those who want to stay and
those who want to go home.
Unfortunately they are married to
each other. **(Peter Eldin)**

I have found, the best way to give
advice to your children, is to find
out what they want and then advice
them to do it. **(Harry S. Truman)**

If second thoughts came before first
thoughts how much wiser would
we be. **(Anonymous)**

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**THE SOUTH INDIA
CHURCHMAN**

The Magazine of the Church of South India

JULY 1999

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Bharat Ratna Nelson Mandela, who was a leader of the masses, laid down office as President of South Africa in favour of Thabo Mbeki. South India Churchman praises God for his contributions!

A VIEW FROM OUTSIDE

Watching TV could be educative and informative at times as it turned out to be when soon after arriving in States recently I switched on the TV just to find out what was going on. What I saw on the screen was truly absorbing and challenging. It so happened the previous day there was some serious discussion in the senate on the recent school shoot-out in Denver which had caught the attention of the world and as a remedial measure the house had passed a resolution saying that to instill some reverence for the abiding values that are the bedrock of civilization and culture especially reverence for life, it be made mandatory to display the Ten Commandments in all the schools!

One group was arguing that it was a clear violation of the established principle of separation of church and state and it would be imposing one's religious views on others while the other group was trying to say that if a measure like this was not taken the American society was doomed and heading for certain disaster. What I could notice was that the American public was well informed and they could if need be, communicate their ideas clearly and convincingly through the media. Sometimes one could find himself agreeing with both the parties even though they were both expressing diametrically opposite views, they could be so articulate and persuasive! There was another serious and

emotional debate too on the Bill on Gun Control, which was being debated by the House of Representatives. The points were so powerfully and poignantly spelled out that it was clear that the people were really coming to grips with the problems facing them. At the same time I also found it difficult to digest how such a well meaning law-to-be could be defeated!

Not long after this I was watching another programme and this time an anchor person was moderating a talk back live programme at the Southern Baptist Annual convention where people were asking all kinds of questions on all kinds of subjects ranging from politics (read

A VIEW FROM THE PEW

immorality in public life and hypocrisy) and society (read violence, sex, media etc.) and the officers of the church and its leaders and the clergy were asked to state the position of the church on topics discussed. It was quite interesting and very revealing the way the church and society interacted to the benefit of all concerned.

We need to ask ourselves how we are using the media in our lives and institutions and the church. From what I have stated above media could be used effectively to stimulate people's thinking and help them clarify their thoughts and values. It could be a facilitator,

an animator which could really challenge people to think seriously about various issues agitating the minds of the people and influence their lives. I was amazed to see an interviewee who called herself a Christian vehemently opposing the government's move to introduce the Ten Commandments in schools saying that it not only violated the principle of separation of church and state but also as a measure that would be offensive to the many Kosovo Muslim refugees who would be entering America soon! I was left wondering if this kind of refinement would ever have any impact or influence on the fanatic Muslims who wherever they are in a majority wage a relentless war for a theocratic state imposing their religious view on all the rest killing themselves and others in mindless orgy of violence and hatred all in the name of an Allah they have never seen who is supposed to be merciful and just! It is beyond my comprehension how anyone who hates his brother whom he can see can love God whom he has not seen' for the scripture rightly warns us in I John 4 : 20,21-

"If someone says, I love God and hates his brother or sister, he/she is a liar; for he/she who does not love his/her brother or sister whom he/she has seen, how can he/she love God whom he/she has not seen ? And this commandment we have from Him : that he/she who loves God must love his/her brother or sister also."

Rev. C. V. Theodore, the Editor, is on his furlough at Little Rock, Arkansas, United States. This "View from the Pew" was e-mailed from there!

A Word From your General Secretary

The tension in the border continues to disturb us. While the Indian Army is endeavouring to regain control over the lost territories from the Pakistani intruders the national parties are busy making their own efforts to come to power in Delhi. In the borders we have already sacrificed enough human life. The Indian Government this time should make constructive plans to find a permanent solution to the Kashmir issue. Regaining two or three places will not give a sense of total security as long as the tension in the borders continue.

Even as we are debating on the LoC (Line of Control) both the common society and the Church in particular are preparing for the crossing of LoM (Line of Millennium). In this process as Christians we have much more responsibility. I hope and pray that we would be able to come up with historic and vibrant programmes to mark this important occasion.

I am very glad to let the entire Church know that Rev.P.J.K. Balmi and Rev.Dr.George Isaac have been declared as Bishops Designate of the dioceses of Karnataka North and North Kerala respectively. Kindly do uphold them in your prayers.

The recent visit of Rev.Bob

Scott from the Desk of Dalit Solidarity Programme in WCC brings the news of the change of his assignment to the Department of Communications. Bishop Eugene Poma will succeed him. CSI expresses her grateful thanks to Bob for all the support he extended to CSI, in particular to the Dalit concerns. In this connection, I am glad to inform



that the Synod Executive Committee, has already recommended for the formation of the Department for Dalit and Tribal Concerns. And the Sub-Committee will present the nature and modalities of the formation of the Department to the forthcoming Executive Committee that will meet on 12, 13, July 1999.

The Moderator and I will be attending the Church of South India - Relations Committee at Stuttgart between the 15th and 17th of this month. We hope that relations with the partner churches would further improve during this visit.

I was so much excited when the Moderator made a bold statement at the Inauguration of

the building of the CSI Bishop Cotton Women's Christian College in Bangalore. He said, "While I wish every success to the College, I also wish that these institutions of the Church open their doors to the children of the poor and that only education will transform their life style that they may have a smile on their face". Continuing the vision of this leader, I encourage all the educational institutions in the CSI to practice the preferential option for the poor towards a value based education that transforms the future of not only this church but also the wider society in which the church is engaged in mission.

By the time the magazine is in your hands, the bishops would have come back from their retreat at Colombo. I am sure this episcopal gathering in Colombo would have certainly created an impact in terms of reconciliation within the national context. This episcopal gathering I trust will bring tidings of excitement to the people of God in the respective dioceses, as the spiritual heads reach fully equipped.

The CSI is grieved at the sudden demise of Dr. Franklyn Balasundaram, one of our outstanding historians who was also a very personal friend of mine. May God console Elizabeth, Clement and Gautam.

Rev. G. Dyvasiruvadam

THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

- The Rev. Dr. K.C. Abraham*

The Cross or Crusade

What is truth? Pilate contemptuously asked. In another context, Jesus said, 'the truth shall make you free'. Again Jesus declared that 'I am the Truth'.

Mahatma Gandhi described his own life story as experiments in truth; for him all his action, even political action was a way of realising the truth, *satyagraha*. Truth for him was God.

Now as Christians we are committed to knowing the truth. We are like the seers of the old, we are seekers of truth. Yet we do not have a clear idea about truth especially its relevance to the day to day life and our relationships.

I am not proposing to give a comprehensive definition or attempt a full-fledged discussion on the concept of truth. Perhaps that can be done in systematic theology classes. I want to isolate a particular aspect of truth which is brought to our awareness by the life, ministry and death of our Lord Jesus Christ i.e., Truth as Relationship. Truth expressed in conceptual and prepositional formulation is one mode of expression of truth which is familiar to us in

the context of academic learning. But truth as relationship gives a new way of looking at ourselves and our life situations.

Jesus' declaration that 'the truth shall make you free' was made in the context of his controversy with Jewish elders - Pharisees and teachers. Jesus was aware of the distortion that had come about in the way truth was understood and applied by these leaders. They used truth as a weapon. Truth as an ideological weapon divides people into *us* and *they*. We see the other who differs from our perspective as our enemies.

The inner truth of every religion is distorted by its followers when they make it into a system or an ideology. The tradition gets solidified and truth becomes a defence of the communal and selfish interests of the votaries of faith. This enslaving system is known as fundamentalism. To free truth from this enslavement is a task that is committed to every honest seeker.

In this context we need to examine Jesus' claim 'I am the truth'. This may sound presumptuous and arrogant. But Jesus does not say "I possess the truth" or 'I give you the truth'. He says 'I am the truth'. He does not wield truth as a weapon. "The truth has become me"¹. You

cannot experience truth apart from concretely expressing it as your life - in all its relationships. It is this relational understanding that brings a new awareness and makes you accountable to the other. In your accountability to the other - in your mutual respect and openness - truth gains a new and wholesome meaning. You cannot experience truth apart from living it. Freedom that comes through truth is a freedom to love and to accept the other in responsibility.

How else one could interpret the meaning of the truth of resurrection? It defies all logic and cannot be easily verified by the scientific tests. Therefore Paul gives as the proof of resurrection, the quality of change in our relationships. With resurrection Christ brings a new humanity, a new creation. Paul is very specific in Col. 3: 1 'Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above'. What are the things above?

Read vs. 12 ff., 'As God's chosen people, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience'.

'Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave

* A Sermon preached at the Chapel of the United Theological College, Bangalore. Dr. K.C. Abraham, a Presbyterian of the Church of South India is the director of South Asia Theological Research Institute and Professor of Christian Ethics at United Theological College, Bangalore.

you.'

All these are about daily relationships - in family, in community, in the wider society. It is in the daily transactions that we need to experience the ultimate victory of Christ over all forces of death. The summary of all the virtues is again given by Paul,

'Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity' vs. 14.

Is this our experience? Looking at the life of our congregations can any one see the truth of resurrection?

The truth as relationship, Jesus' way of truth has some specific implications for us.

First, it means truth is experienced in community. A community is true when relationships, internal as well as external, are open and free. If truth is experienced as relationship, then community becomes the context in which truth is lived. Here again we face a gross distortion. Community is becoming communal - closed group based on caste, tribe, language or region. While they are all elements necessary for the building up of a healthy relationship, they tend to be absolutist and exclusivist; they have frozen the truth at the level of present awareness as the measure of truth. Sometimes these identities are oppressive and dominating, distorting the truth of community. Male domination and caste

domination are distortions of truth, distortion of community.

An authentic community can happen when we honestly face these distortions and rebuild our relations. A couple of years ago, the new regime in South Africa instituted a commission known as 'Truth and Reconciliation'.

It was headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It is popularly called, 'Truth Commission'. The idea is before reconciliation between the whites and blacks in the new government, they have to face the truth of the past racist regime, the apartheid and the atrocities committed to the blacks. It is a painful process for the people to relive those horrid experiences, especially for the people who were directly responsible for the administration. But it is necessary to face the truth and to come to terms with it in order they may be able to build a new society.

Second, Truth comes when the falsehood with which we have lived stands exposed. But it also means to face the implications of the truth you supposedly claim for yourselves and for your traditions. Jesus exposed the hollowness of the claims of the leaders of the Jews when they said, they were descendants of Abraham. Jesus asks, have you really faced the implications of this claim? Instead they live by false claims that has distorted the essence of truth. Truth is concealed.

Our temptation in modern

life is to live with false claims that masks the truth. They shield us from facing the reality of the situation.

For example we prefer not to see the ever burgeoning slums in our cities but only the high rising building. They are constructed with the ruthlessly exploited labour of the construction workers who end up in our slums. We are proud of our technological growth and the faster communication facilities available to us. But we prefer not to see the poverty and hardship of the excluded sections.

In our personal relationships we prefer to wear a mask and cleverly conceal our real selves behind it. Our relationship has become artificial and superficial. In our perfunctory remarks we ask 'how are you'? Neither the interlocutor nor the respondent is not at all interested to know the truth of the well being of the person in question. That is why if someone tries to answer this question truthfully and begin to tell all about his or her woes, we become confused. We are only satisfied to be on a superficial level.

It is a ritual in some of our congregations - especially in the English speaking churches, to thank the preacher and say 'it was a wonderful sermon' even when the sermon would have been boring! Both the preacher and the congregation are not willing to face the truth of the situation. If they did our sermons in the churches would

improve considerably!

Thirdly, the Cross is Jesus' way of confronting us with truth. At the foot of the cross all pretensions, false truths and partial truths stand exposed. Neither are we fearful about our failures or anxious about pleasing any one. We can be ourselves through the empowering grace given to us by Jesus' selfless love. It empowers us to be truthful about ourselves and our relationships.

We are given the courage to be truthful to our partners, to be truthful among our colleagues and to be truthful in all our

relationships. We do not see the other as a threat or as someone to be conquered or dominated, or even avoided; but the other as your partner. It is in this way the Spirit leads us to truth. Cross is truth.

A couple of years ago I participated in a high profile international dialogue on peace between Muslims and Christians in Vienna. There were notable Muslim theologians from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Indonesia and Pakistan. Christian theologians from U.S.A., Europe and Asia participated.

In one of the papers which I presented I outlined the central importance of the cross for Christian faith. No sooner did I finish, then a Muslim theologian stood up and thanked me for my presentation, then added a piece of 'truth'. He said, yes, you may be right that cross is the centre of Christian faith, but in history we have seen Christians organising crusades bearing the cross. He is right. Have we turned the cross into crusades? Can our church life, our evangelism bear the mark of cruciform Christ and not the imperial, conquering crusade? This question we need to ponder in the present situation. *

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THE DALIT PREFIX: A CHRISTIAN DILEMMA

*M. Deenabandhu**

The 'Dalit' prefix has become a matter of embarrassment for many well-meaning, mostly urban middle class Christians who have managed to achieve certain degree of economic mobility to camouflage their untouchable past. They argue that calling themselves Dalits now, even if they belong to that background, would be a denial of the new dignified identity in Christ. They also insist that since they are no more oppressed either socially or economically, such an affirmation would sound hypocritical. The present emphasis on the Dalit issue and on the need to render justice to the Dalits both within and outside the Church, has also become a cause of anxiety for some who argue, in all earnestness, that priority in the Dalit issue over all else would seriously distort the universal character of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ and would divide the Church further. A long debated issue indeed! But it seems necessary to raise it again in view of the continuing marginalisation of the Dalits on one hand the growing trend of social elitism, especially among Christians on the other.

The Pervasive Influence of Caste

But the moot questions here are: Whether the non-dalits

would treat them as equals even if the dalits insist that they are? In other words, even if they want to believe that the new Christian identity has helped them to bury the shameful identity, can they deny that they do not live in a casteless society? Has this so-called 'Christian identity' made any difference to the large number of Dalits who live in villages and slums? What else is the relevance of salvation if it does not mean liberation from oppressive cultures and from a life of unending shame and depravation?

There are a host of empirical questions too: Even if one has achieved certain degree of economic mobility on account of education and occupation, is it possible to simply ignore the caste factor in social relationships, in matters regarding marriage, leadership, positions of power etc? In our work places, is it possible for a Christian from Dalit background to command respect and not subjected to derision at all?

The fact is that Indian society is a caste conscious society. Can we deny the active presence of caste in getting jobs, promotions, transfers, seats in colleges and universities, loans, development assistance, political representation or other such opportunities? Take a look at the ways in which the upper

castes promote their own people wherever possible. Even a casual observation of any government office or institution should be able to dispel any illusions one may have of the prospects of egalitarianism in the Indian society. A good number of our political parties are basically caste cliques. Our political dynamics at all levels depend on caste interests. Or take a look at the matrimonial columns in Sunday newspapers where majority of them - well educated, extremely wealthy, living abroad or in urban areas, uninhibitedly advertising for alliances with spouses of same caste or sub-caste. Even the Church is not an exception in this regard. A great majority of upper caste Christians make it a point to reveal and take pride in their caste identity in the guise of their long ecclesiastical traditions.

We have many churches in India which openly and shamelessly practice caste and segregate the Dalits even today. The converts from upper and intermediary castes always insist on making known their caste background, even when they present their Christian credentials in the form of testimonies of direct encounter with God. We may find a few stray cases of overcoming caste mentality. But generalisations are inevitable in a social ethos

** He teaches at the Gurukul Theological College and Research Centre in Chennai.*

characterised by the pervasive influence of caste.

Reasons more Social than Spiritual

Then is it not proper to contend that we do not want to talk about the Dalit past not because we are proud of our new Christian identity, but because we are afraid of being rejected by a caste conscious society? It is not true when the Dalits say that there is no caste for Christians in India and they are liberated and are equal to others, but only when others recognise and treat them so? Till then all these claims can at best give an imaginary emancipated social status.

It is true that some have managed to extricate themselves from the stifling tentacles of caste. Thanks to the educational opportunities, social reforms and mission compounds. But we must admit that these are only a small minority and the majority, most of them their own kith and kin, are still subjected to intense forms of caste oppression and marginalisation, and the consequent poverty and powerlessness. The continued atrocities and the practice of untouchability today need to be specially mentioned here. Incidentally they are the Church, the majority of Christians in India today who live mostly in rural areas and are landless agricultural labourers. Whether one likes it or not, that is the real identity of the Indian Church. But unfortunately the official church hides this reality. The

Dalit Christians continue to feel marginalised in matters of leadership and participation. In many churches the Dalit aspiration for justice and equality is branded as a casteist aspiration and is being met with stiff resistance.

We must also recognise the Dalit Christians as a distinct group is persecuted on account of their faith. They are discriminated by the state for their option to be Christians and are denied of opportunities and assistance to overcome poverty and oppression. They have been appealing to the successive governments to grant them all benefits and privileges on par with the scheduled castes. Such irresponsible assertions that Christians are no more Dalits, will work against the cause of the Dalits who are seeking justice while holding on to their Christian faith. On the other hand, these disprivileged Christians may not be granted scheduled caste status, but my strong feeling is that these so-called liberated Christians who resent the Dalit tag now will queue up to claim the same if the government should grant the Dalit Christian demand.

The urban, middle-class hesitation over the Dalit issue reveals that their attitudes are motivated more by their own social priorities than spiritual imperatives. In their middle class pursuit of social elitism, the radical character of the gospel seems to have gone through a mutation to such an extent that

it hardly has anything to do with that Jesus who asked people to recognise the signs of the kingdom in his acts of liberating, healing and restoring people. As Max Weber said, what the privileged classes require of religion is the psychological reassurance of legitimacy or deservedness of one's happiness, good fortune, political success, superior economic status, bodily health, happy marriage, etc., in contrast to those who are unfortunate. Their notions of salvation in Christ are individualistic and thus capitalistic in orientation, leaving the divine intentions of justice, freedom and dignity for all on the margins of their spirituality. If liberation from socio-economic oppression is what the Dalits need today, what these 'other' Christians need is liberation from this selfish pursuit of social acceptance in the guise of this dubious 'new identity in Christ' and a spirituality that makes the norms of Christian discipleship convenient and elastic.

A Christian Imperative

'In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither Dalit nor non-Dalit'. Until and unless the non -Dalits and the privileged not only say this but also desist from asserting their privileged identity, Christ will continue to struggle with the Dalits to demolish this dehumanising culture and its structures of social relationships. In a polarised and fragmented world, God's plan of genuine universal

reconciliation (Eph. 1:9, 10) is possible only when life in all its abundance is available for all those to whom it is denied. The affirmation of oneness of all in Christ, therefore, is not only an ideal but also an ethic that demands our moral transformation.

Jesus through his life and actions testifies to this divine plan of universal reconciliation and shows us the way through his liberative solidarity with the victims of all forms of unjust and oppressive human assertion. By naming the poor and those who struggle for justice and righteousness as the inheritors of the kingdom, he describes that his activity of judging people, a matter of great concern for all Christians, in fact, will be based on what one is and does to the least of his brothers and sisters; those who are hungry, homeless, thirsty, naked and sick on account of poverty and irresponsible human aggression, and even punished for the sins and crimes they did not commit. There are many in our society who go through these experiences. But the Dalits, as a distinct category of people, numbering about 200 million, go through all these experiences on account of the evil of caste. By rejecting that Dalit identity, which Jesus owned of the Dalits of his day, are we not actually indulging in heresy? Whether we like it or not, the gospel testifies to this Dalit Jesus. The Church, as a

community founded on the memory of Jesus and which lives in the hope of the coming reign of God, has a spiritual obligation to join this process.

With the Dalits to the Lord's Banquet

The term 'Dalit', which means broken, crushed, destroyed, etc. gives expression to the new consciousness of the oppressed people of the source and nature of their oppression. As such it has a revolutionary character. It testifies to the Dalit determination to fight an evil, and a culture of dehumanisation. Therefore, the Dalit struggle is not a caste struggle. It is a struggle against caste, a major cause of poverty, stagnation and dehumanisation and an active agent of the moral degeneration of the Indian society. Majority of the poor in India is the victims of caste oppression. We cannot adequately express our concern for the poor without fighting the causes of poverty. Therefore, the Dalit movement is a creative force. It alone can help India to present itself as a progressive nation. If certain status conscious Christians do not want to join this movement of God's people, God's work of liberation and transformation of the Indian society will not stop, but they will simply lose an opportunity to be a part of it.

Similarly, Dalit theology is not a caste theology. It is a way of entering into a new era of theological authenticity, of

saying 'enough' to the inherited theologies, missiologies and ecclesiologies that have been with us so long and of understanding and articulating the meaning and implications of Christian faith afresh in a dialogical relationship with the context of our faith. It is a way of announcing our spiritual maturity by placing the concerns of the gospel before our own social aspirations and priorities. Taking pride in the despised Dalit identity of the Indian Church is a way of affirming Christ's sway of heralding the Kingdom of God, with the oppressed and excluded as the agents of this process, and with the rejected stone becoming the corner stone. It is a way of finding the way to be 'the salt of the earth' - an agent of transformation in the caste-ridden Indian society.

Therefore, while it is necessary for all Dalit Christians to reclaim and take pride in their Dalit heritage, it is a Christian imperative for all, even if one is not from a Dalit background. This implies identifying themselves with the Dalits and entering into their predicament as well as their struggles for a new polity of justice, freedom and human dignity for all. If we do not want to join this struggle against caste, it implies that we have certain vested interest in its continuance. As our Lord said, 'if you give yourself away and all that you cherish important, for others, you are not far from the kingdom'. *



SEMINAR ON WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT

The Presidents, Secretaries and Officers of the Women's Fellowships of the different dioceses of the Church of South India met for a Seminar on Women and Environment at the Vishranthi Nilayam campus in Bangalore on the 5th and 6th of May 1999.

The Rev. Dr. Russell Chandran inaugurated the Seminar. The keynote address was delivered by the Rev. G. Dyvasirvadam, General Secretary of the CSI. Mr. Vinod Victor, Synod Youth Secretary led the worships and Bible studies with Molly. The addresses were given by Dr. Edwin Chandrasekaran, Principal, Bishop Heber College and Mrs. Suma Bailey. Rev. Mrs. Krupaveni Prakasa Rao, the President of the Women's Fellowship led the morning devotion. All the first ladies of the dioceses who participated with their Women's Fellowship Officers were greatly benefitted.

KERALA REGIONAL CONFERENCE

The Kerala Regional Conference of the Women's Fellowship was held at the CSI Youth Centre, Kovalam, Trivandrum from the 25th to the 27th of May 1999. The Rt. Rev. Dr. J.W. Gladstone, bishop of South Kerala Diocese inaugurated the programme. The leaders and resource persons included Mrs. Krupaveni Prakasa Rao, Sister Thankamma Varkey, Mrs. Hepsi Joy Gladstone, Mrs. Eliamma Samuel, Rev. Mrs. Marathakavalli David, Dr. Alexander Jacob, IPS, Mrs. Flory Benjamin, Rev. John Winslow, Mrs. Joice Israel among others. Mr. Vinod Victor, Synod Youth Secretary led the morning Bible Studies. Molly Vinod and Mercy Jose led the singing. Representatives from all the four dioceses participated and were benefitted.

A THOUGHT FOR YOU....

Beauty is an attractive word, specially for women. Much money and time is spent to ensure outward beauty. But then there is surely a deeper intricate realm to real beauty which surpasses externalities.

It is in a context of women's servitude and worthlessness that Jesus sees beauty in an act of adoration of the women who broke the alabaster at His feet. The perfume that constitutes the worth of our lives is not to be contained in jars. It has to be broken and poured out. It is in this breaking and pouring out that real beauty lies.

The testimony that Mary received from Jesus that she did something beautiful for Him came in acknowledgement of her willingness to give not in parts, but in totality - not even keeping the jar for herself. Wherever the Gospel is preached, Jesus said this beautiful thing that she did will also be remembered. Do we in our lives do such beautiful things that become worthy to be acknowledged by Jesus to the extent that it could become part of the very Gospel that we preach and live by? Jesus by His death on the Cross of Calvary demonstrated to the world what true giving actually is. He gave everything He had including His life for others. As His followers what do we give? What beautiful things do we do? What beauty do people see in us?

Sister Thankamma Varkey

CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

- Susikaran Thangasami

G.K. Chesterton derided mysticism, "It begins in 'mist', centres on 'I' and ends in 'schism'. He of course, voices the fear of many. It is true that mysticism is difficult to articulate and to express but I venture to do it for I feel sensitised to "what the Spirit is saying".

I do not claim originality, perfection or finality but in humility desire to share some simple thoughts with my readers. Mystics are persons gripped by an intense awareness of the unfathomable mystery of the divine. They are not satisfied with the historically or culturally expressed symbols of the mystery of the divine - they transcend these and are painfully conscious of the inadequacy of such symbols. They know, like St. Augustine, that the theologians' concepts "hide God more than they reveal Him".

Mystics try to explain an experience rather than to communicate a "knowledge". They argue for its validity while desisting from claiming uniqueness or finality. By a contemplative silence an interpenetration between self and divine occurs giving a lively feeling of oneness with all that exists. The ego is quelled and a calmness surrounds. It is not so much an excitement as peace.

Here we would do well to read what Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says about biblical religious

experience.

'Moses saw God in the burning bush, and Elijah heard the still small voice. In Jeremiah we read: 'This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my hand in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it.' Jesus' experience of God is the basic fact for Christianity: 'As he came up out of the river he saw the heavens parted above him and the spirit descending like a dove towards him: and he heard a voice sounding out of the heavens and saying "Thou art my beloved son. I have chosen thee". According to St. Mark, the baptism in the Jordan by John was to Jesus the occasion of a vivid and intense religious experience, so much so that he felt that he had to go for a time into absolute solitude to think it over. He obviously spoke of the ineffable happening, the sudden revelation, the new peace and joy in words that have come down to us. He emphasised the newness of the reborn soul as something which marks him off from all those who are religious only at second hand. 'Verily I say unto you, among men born of women there has not arisen a man greater than John the Baptist; but the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.'

The vision that came to Saul on the Damascus road and

turned the persecutor into an apostle is another illustration. Faith means in St. James acceptance of dogma; in St. Paul it is the surrender of heart and mind to Christ; but in the Epistle to the Hebrews, faith is defined as that outreaching of the mind by which we become aware of the invisible world. (*An Idealist View of Life*, P.71)

Bede Griffiths, says "We have constantly to learn to see beyond the passing forms of this world to the eternal reality which is always there. It means passing from our present mode of consciousness, which is conditioned by time and space, into the deeper level of consciousness which transcends the dualities external and internal, subject and object, conscious and unconscious, and becomes one with the non-dual Reality, the Brahman, the Atman, the Tao, the Void, the Word, the Truth, whatever name we give to that which cannot be named. It is this alone that gives reality to our lives and a meaning to human existence" (*A New Vision of Reality*, p.226).

For Schopenhauer, the Upanishadic aphorism "*Tat tvamasi*" - "*you are that*" carries an ethical injunction. "Compassion, which is the basis of all genuine, that is unselfish virtue, arises from a realisation that one's own inner being is also that of other beings."

According to Tagore, it is a

state in which all the fever and fret of one's embodied existence come to an end. In self-realisation, the discord, conflicts and contradictions of life are quietened. Knowledge, love and action are harmonised into a unity. This becomes possible because man comes to realise the meaninglessness of the very root-distinctions from which all these distinctions emerge. That is the distinction between 'me' and 'thou' or between 'mine' and 'thine'.

Fr Paul "living in Christ" is the *sine qua non* of Christian life and he repeats this injunction about 160 times in his epistles. For him the life-death border got blurred and could say "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain" ... which shall I choose I cannot tell, I am hard pressed between the two" (Philippians 1: 21 - 24). Yet he found it necessary to live for the sake of others.

The practical implication of this exercise and experience is compassion. It is an outflow from the irresistible sense of ontological commonality of everything that exists. What happens to anything is happening to you. That is why Nietzsche embraced the horse that was being beaten by its owner and allowed the lashes to fall on his own back and that is why Gandhi called oranges his sisters. In such a frame of mind one cannot "hurt a fly" and twist a twig.

To promote life, peace and

joy to everyone, everywhere and in every possible way is the fall-out of Christian mysticism. It is not withdrawal into seclusion and inactivity. It is activism with detachment.

Ways to Christian Mysticism

Silence is an essential precondition to hear the "still, small voice". Vast spaces enable us to have the proper perspective of ourselves - our smallness and our transitoriness and help us to redeem us from ourselves. Our sense of separateness and ego is lost. Paul cried, "who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7: 24).

The beauty of nature entralls us with a sense of the majesty and power of God and helps us towards transcendence. A scientific view of our biology makes it clear that in our very essence of existence there is interpenetration with all that exists. Each of our living cells is surrounded by water and this fluid is in constant interaction with the environment deriving its nutrition and oxygen and also for elimination.

As for church and rituals, we get so much used to them that they are hardly inspirational. In his Presidential address to the Lambeth Conference (July '98), Dr. George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, lamented that the Church is stuck with a "petty round of ecclesiastical functions, the smell of hymn books and tedious

homilies".

The Psalmist had a sense of transcendence when he cried "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence" (Ps 139:7) and the hymn writer when he wrote, "Here O Lord I see Thee face to face...". Personally I have found hymns and lyrics inspiring.

However, my own prescription is that we should marinate in the sayings of Jesus and the exhortations of the epistles day and night. We shall thereby pick up the wherewithal needed for mystic experience and be led not to selfish spiritually but to compassion and altruistic activism.

May God help us to this end.

OBITUARIES

We regret to inform the readers about the sad demise of Dr. Mrs. Kamala Lazarus, (wife of Late Bishop Henry Lazarus) who passed away on Sunday the 20th of June 1999 and that of Dr. Franklyn Balasundaram, Professor of History of Christianity at the UTC and Presbyter of the Madras Diocese on Saturday the 3rd July 1999. Our condolences to the bereaved families.

PASTOR'S PAGE

The Director, Pastoral Aid Department has great pleasure to share the experiences with the fellow servants in the vineyard of the Lord to the CSI family.

INTERACTION WITH THE PASTORS OF KARNATAKA NORTHERN DIOCESE

The pastors of Karnataka Northern Diocese met for two days of retreat and reflection on the theme, 'Spirit of God, Come, equip the church for the 21st Century' in Dharwad on 21st and 22nd May 1999. In the absence of a bishop there, the Diocesan Secretary Mr. R.S. Jogal and the Diocesan Treasurer, Mr. K. Devasahayam made all the necessary arrangements. Rev.G. Dyvasirvadam, the General Secretary of the Synod and Rev. G. Devakadasham, the Director, Pastoral Aid Department gave talks on the theme. Many pastors came out sharing their burdens and concerns of the Ministry in the Diocese. They expressed their willingness to meet periodically to strengthen the fellowship among the pastors.

KRISHNA-GODAVARI DIOCESAN PASTORS AT THE SYNOD CENTRE



Traditionally the Directors of the Synod go to the Diocese to meet the pastors for retreats and conferences. A new practice of bringing the pastors to the Synod Centre began with the Krishna-Godavari Diocesan pastors with Bishop meeting in the CSI centre, Chennai for retreat. Bishop T.B.D. Prakasa Rao and 74 of his clergy spent two days (May 31 and June 1, 1999) at the Synod Centre, retreating and reflecting on the Ministry in the Diocese. This programme was co-sponsored by CASA, Chennai and ECLOF. The Bishop gave leadership for the retreat. Mr. Frederick William, the Hon. Treasurer of the Synod greeted and welcomed the pastors.

Rev. G. Dyvasirvadam, the General Secretary, Rev. G. Devakadasham, the Director, PAD, Rev. C.V. Theodore, the Director, Communications Department, Mr. Joseph P. John, the Chief Zonal Officer, CASA, Chennai, Dr. Viji Thampi Solomon, Director, ECLOF India gave resourceful inputs to the pastors to think about the Ministry at the threshold of this millennium and in the next millennium. Rev. Dr. W.S. Milton Jeganathan, Director Mission and Evangelism and Rev. Vinod Victor, Secretary, Youth Department greeted the pastors on behalf of their department. Dr. Richard Devadoss, Board of Diaconal Ministry took the pastors to the dalit context through the organised cultural programme.

MISSION LIVE !!

*Rev.B.D. Prasada Rao**

In the context of churches partnership all over the world, the Methodist Church in Britain has initiated a programme called the 'Mission Live Visitors'. This is a programme of mutual enrichment of sharing mission stories across the cultures. All these years missionaries used to come from the West to the East. Now the need is felt that the faith experiences in the East need to be shared in the West to strengthen the church in the West. I went to England on the short term mission live programme from mid April to mid June.

The two months time has really enhanced my visions of Christian educational ministry in different circumstances of the congregation. I am thankful to the officers of the Synod for giving me this opportunity.

My experiences in England include programmes with almost all categories of the groups in various congregations like children, youth, adults, women, senior citizens, homes for the aged, rehabilitation centres of the homeless, industrial congregations, rural churches, conferences of church leaders, ecumenical gatherings, home groups etc. I also could visit the religious education departments of the schools and universities for acquiring the insights of educational strategies. I am thankful to the educational departments and University departments for giving me this opportunity.

It was a great opportunity to

take part in one of the national level consultation of the National Christian Education Council which was held in Birmingham.

The issues and challenges of the congregations in England are the



presumable subject matter for me to ponder upon how the Indian faith stories can encourage them for revival. The need of the hour seems to be how best one can resist the dying nature of the congregations which have become so thin as single digit membership. There is no dearth for money or facilities, yet people are losing interest or meaning in being the members of the worshipping community.

The Youth have disappeared from the churches into the weekend recreations. Church seems to have exhausted all its trials to attract the youth back to the church. In many of the churches children are considered to be noisy and a disturbance. Sunday schools are reduced almost to nil under the fear of child abuse. Parents are preserving their children in a strange culture that they almost are becoming alien to the faith community as such. Growing

individualism, consumerism, permissive nature of the society, drugs and several other post modern features have become a threat to the longevity of the church. Selling away the church buildings is not an uncommon thing nowadays.

The younger generation seems to be heading towards a strange vacuum of spiritual disaster.

Enormous studies have been undertaken to analyse the problem of churches being closed down in several places. Yet the solution seems to be mysterious. In this context the church looks

at the countries where the church growth is so rapid, for alternative strategies. May it be Indian spirituality in the East and black Christian solidarity in Africa and Latin America be solutions?

Ministers and church leaders are terribly worried about this phenomenon and are trying innumerable options to save the situation. Somebody in the West uttered "our riches may be our problems". This needs to be examined critically. Every church seems to be left with the aged members of the retired community. No traces of youth and children. Somebody else exclaimed whether the aged members are in a way monopolising the churches for their only left option of time pass and recreation. I want to be polite not to agree with this statement. However all this is only one side of the problem with several exceptions because of which the church lives.

* He is the Director of Christian Education Department of the CSI Synod and was recently in England on a Mission Live Visitor's programme

IS THERE A CHURCH IN THE CITY

Where is the Church in the city?
Wherever God-centered people
live
Come along
Here, this is a place
Where Christian people came to
worship God
Be seated here ...
You seem to be a 'stranger'
Come on in join us in fellowship
We welcome you.
I am not dressed up properly
I do not belong to this place
I am an uprooted man
I have none to care -
No worry
Here we are
Love to love you
Happy to care for you
You are not different from us
You belong to us
You are one among us
You belong to my family
Brother and sister
Rejoice and thank God
We got a new arrival today
Mr.Life
He brings new life into us
Yes,
I see the Church in the city
I see the new life in the city
I discovered roots of my family
here
I am where I should be
Indeed,
You are a good shepherd.

MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH ...?

Oh ... How ... I wish we are all
one.

And belong to one church

But

They speak different idioms

They were and are my
oppressors

Their culture is different

Their concerns are different

They consider me as
untouchable

I am a Dalit, a casteless person

I don't dress up as they dress up

I don't behave as they behave

What can I learn from my
oppressor?

'Suffering is my way of life',

'Prosperity' is their goal of life',

'Enoughness' is my goal of life',

I love to be a part of the
community

They love their self

Can I see God in my oppressor?

I rather belong where people
belong to me,

Where I could see my God

Accompanying me in struggles
of my life.

POET'S CORNER

*Poems by Rev. Jeevan Babu,
Presbyter of the Fort Church, Vellore*

GUN OR GOD? WHO IS OMNIPOTENT?

What right we have to kill
another person?

Who is the other?

He/She is made in the image of
God

Then, why vengeance or
violence?

Why produce nuclear weapons/

Why produce chemical
weapons?

Why scuds & missiles?

Why military expenses?

Why wars?

Just to kill a co-human being

For not of his fault,

He receives the death warrant

'Gun' could never be the
omnipotent .

Let us not destroy God's world ..

Let us not deprive the life on
earth

Let us affirm life as God is
omnipotent

Violence begets violence and
death

Peace begets peace and life

Go forward to abolish all
weapons

Fuller life for all living

Good-bye Gun

Welcome God

O God, I am with you

Let us journey together.

NEWS

College Students Conference, Dharwad

Under the auspices of the HES Committee of the Karnataka Northern Diocese a College Students Conference specially for the recipients of the Higher Education Scholarship was held at the CSI Retreat Centre, Dharwad from 11th to 13th of June 1999. The Rev.Jogula inaugurated the Conference. The Synod Youth Secretary Rev.Vinod Victor and Mrs.Molly Vinod were the Resource persons for this Seminar. The other leaders included Mr.S.K.Adgal, Prof.John S.Kuri, Rev.Sarvade, Mr.R.S.Jogal, Mr.Devasahayam among others. Over 150 youngsters participated and were benefitted.



College Students Retreat, Trivandrum

The Youth Department of the South Kerala Diocese, organised a Retreat for College Students at the CSI Youth Centre, Kovalam from the 23rd to 25th of June 1999. Dr.Neelalohitha Das, the Hon. Minister for Transport, Kerala State inaugurated the Retreat. The resource persons included Rt.Rev.Dr.J.W.Gladstone, the Bishop. Rev.Ben Gladstone, the Vice-Chairman, Dr.S.Devanesan, the Secretary, Mr.Baburaj Prasad, the Treasurer, Rev.Vinod Victor the Synod Youth Secretary, Molly Vinod, Mr.Cheriyian Philip and Mrs.Sreedevi among others. Over 100 youngsters participated and were blessed.



FAREWELL TO NIRANJANI DAVID

Mrs. Niranjani David who was in the staff of the CSI Council for Healing Ministry for the last seven years has left the service of the CSI Synod. She has since joined the staff of the Madras YWCA. A farewell meeting was arranged for her at the CSI Centre on the 1st of July 1999 where her yeomen services were lauded by her colleagues.

with
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN INDIA - YOUTH DESK
is organising

A THREE DAY SEMINAR

on

RESPONSE OF YOUTH TO THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN INDIA

Background

Yet another General Election is thrust upon the nation. We are at a critical and crucial crossroad in history. On one end, political platforms are being 'used' to perpetrate religious fundamentalism, thereby creating an atmosphere of cultural regimentation and fascist authoritarianism, while on the other end, smaller political outfits, quite often centered on 'individuals' and not 'ideologies', are mushrooming. At risk in this mad rush for political survival is the rich pluralist, cultural heritage of our society.

The struggle for stable governance in India, wherein, the rudiments of democratic values would be protected has become a historic struggle today lest the tide of globalisation sweeps the nation off its feet.

The church as a body of believers should play a prophetic role to help the nation come out of this Labyrinth of political uncertainty. The youth should be able to critically discern and assess the political processes at work and then to formulate and propagate a collective response.

Objectives

- * To assess the state of the nation today
- * To understand the political processes in India
- * To understand the new political economy emerging in India
- * To develop a consciousness of individual and group for political transformation
- * To take steps to restore the democratic policy of the nation.

Dates

Friday 23rd July 1999 10 a.m

to

Sunday 25th July 1999 4 p.m.

Venue

CSI Centre, 5, Whites Road, Royapettah Chennai - 600 014

Leaders

Eminent Political Analysts

Participants

Youth Leaders concerned about the nation

Registration Fee

Rs. 50/-

For further details contact: The Synod Youth Department

CSI COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING KETTI, THE NILGRIS - 643 215

Applications for first year Engineering course can be obtained from The Principal, CSI College of Engineering, Ketti, The Nilgris - 643 215, on payment of Rs.325/= in the form of DD drawn in favour of CSI College of Engineering, payable at Coimbatore and enclosing a self addressed stamped (Rs.12/=) envelope.

The courses offered are

1. B.E. Mechanical Engineering
2. B.E. Electrical & Electronics Engineering
3. B.E. Computer Science & Engineering
4. B.E. Information Technology
5. B.E. Electronics and Communication Engineering

Last two courses would be offered subject to the approval of AICTE and affiliation by Bharathiar University.

Eligibility

1. One should have scored a minimum aggregate of 180 in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry put together.
2. One should not have completed 21 years on 01.07.99

Last date of receipt of completed applications and admission is 31st July '99. Seats are reserved on "First come first served basis" on payment of Refundable deposit.

Dr.S.J.Jeyapaulan

B.E., M.Sc. (Engg). P.hd.
Principal.

The Most Rev.William Moses

B.A., B.T., B.D., S.T.M.,
Bishop and Chairman &
Moderator of CSI

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